178. Corruption in public service.

MR. M. L. JANARDANA PILLAI (*Trading Classes, Alleppey*). said that he was very sorry that he had to speak on a subject which was painful both to himself and to the Government. This was not a pleasant task, but he wanted to place certain matters before the Government with a view to help them to stamp out corruption, high-handedness and inefficiency in the public service. It was true that there were in service officers whose integrity, capacity, fair-mindedness and high sense of duty would do credit to any service in any part of the world, but the opposite section was also well represented in the public service of the State.

It should be the ideal and endeavour of the Government to make the public service quite pure in every respect. But the Government were not showing any sincere desire or anxiety to find out and bring the offenders to book. Invariably, the Government were slack in this matter and allowed things to drift, with the result that the corrupt officers had not only no fear but felt that they were quite safe. They knew that their superior officers were aware of their corruption and they were quite sure that they would support them for the sake of prestige. Same was the case with official high-handedness and favouritism practised by officials. The superior officers were not anxious to understand the complaints of the public in the matter and their attitude was that they should protect their subordinates in season and out of season, whether or not there was truth in the complaints made. The Government should check this and put down with an iron hand corruption of all sorts, high-handedness and injustice on the part of the Government officers.

The member said that there were instances where high officers who had been found to be corrupt by the Government had been retained in the service, and where officers who had been reported against as very corrupt had subsequently been given high promotions. There were medical officers in the State service who insisted on payment of money even for the treatment of patients in the hospitals under their charge. An officer demanding money from the public was deemed guilty of corruption, but a medical officer who refused to attend on a patient in the hospital unless he was paid what he demanded, was not considered so. Again, there were cases where certain Government officers actively and openly took part in Municipal and Legislative Council elections. Though the fact was immediately brought to the notice of the Government, nothing was done in the matter. There was again a wide-spread scandal regarding the distribution of agricultural loans. This was admitted by all the witnesses of the Economic Depression Enquiry Committee. There were complaints that certain officers insisted upon having 5 per cent. commission on the loans granted. The manner and method adopted in prescribing vernacular text-books again had given rise to much scandal.

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The public could not in the nature of things take up the responsibility of bringing a charge of corruption against the officers, with the result that corruption flourished very successfully. It was the duty of the Government to conduct private enquiries and to find out the character and conduct of their officers from time to time and satisfy themselves that all was well with their public service. The Government would not do this. On the other hand, they even resented any statement made by a public representative that their officers were corrupt. If a country should be happy and prosperous, its public service should be pure and above suspicion. At the same time, the service should be assured of all safety from untrue attacks. The officers should have confidence that the Government would protect them at all costs ; such safety was essential in the interest of the country also. But the Government should make their own confidential enquiries and bring the offenders to book. Property statements were being called for from the officers. But in the majority of cases these statements were false and would not stand a rigorous scrutiny. The Government were not keen to ascertain how far these statements of earnings were true. In fact, they were always anxious to white-wash their officers. This attitude resulted in deterioration of the public service.

The member next cited some instances to show how promptly the Mysore Government dealt with certain corrupt officers of that State and said that what he wanted to impress on the attention of the Government was that they should have a real desire to put down corruption at all costs. It was often contended that it was open to the representatives of the people to come forward and make definite charges against corrupt officers and offer to prove them. But a private individual had to think twice before he made a charge against an officer and it was very difficult to prove a charge of corruption and high-handedness. The public service was a very strong institution, very influential and well entrenched against attacks. The Government would also help it indirectly. The Government had shown by their actions that even Legislative Council members were not to be protected, even when such charges were made on the floor of the House. The Government should not wait for the representatives of the people to come forward and prove charges against their officers. It was their duty to take action against their servants whose integrity was not above suspicion, because for every rupee of tainted money a corrupt officer received from the people, the State would be losing at least ten rupees.

In conclusion, the member said that the Government should see that their officers were not corrupt or high-handed, that corruption should be put down with an iron hand and that they should give legal protection to the members of the Legislative Council and the Assembly in regard to the charges they make against officers. The Government should also make it clear that they would not hold fast to the principle of seniority alone for promotion, but would encourage only officers of proved honesty and ability. Honest and capable men should be singled out for preferential treatment in service.

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DEWAN'S REPLY: Government are very keen and most anxious, Mr. Janardana Pillai, to stamp out corruption. No representation with that end in view will be resented. But, such representations must be made in good faith; and the officer against whom a charge is made, must be given every opportunity to answer the charge, and must not be unfairly punished or removed on flimsy grounds, on grounds not supported by evidence. Government will not allow prestige to stand in their way of checking corruption, favouritism and high-handedness. But, I do not entirely agree with you in one particular point. I think that this is a matter in which the public can help the Government very much. They should not have the fear to which you alluded.

Your suggestion about the members of the Legislative Council being given certain privileges, will be considered.

MEMBER: There are officers who have been found corrupt by the Government and who have subsequently been promoted.

DEWAN: That will be looked into.

179. Some urgent administrative reforms.

MR. N. K. PADMANABHA PILLAI (*Neyyattinkara taluk, Group I*) said that twenty-eight years ago when His late Highness Sri Mulam Tirunal constituted the Assembly, it was considered as an institution of unparallelled importance and its inauguration a measure fraught with the greatest possibilities. And so it proved to be in the long years that intervened. But the times changed and the Assembly in its existing form ceased to serve its purpose. When the Assembly was first constituted, the Legislative Council was mainly an official body, mainly functioning for legislative purposes. The Assembly was therefore constituted with the definite object of bringing the Government into direct touch with the people's representatives and ascertaining their needs and aspirations. This purpose was admirably served by the Assembly until the Legislative Council was reconstituted with enlarged functions and powers. Since then the members of the Assembly had been repeatedly urging on the attention of the Government the urgent necessity of reforming the Assembly. It was however gratifying that His Highnes the Maha Raja was graciously pleased to satisfy the popular aspirations in this direction by making an announcement on the occasion of his assuming ruling powers that the Assembly would be reconstituted on a statutory basis, with enlarged powers and functions. The member wanted to take the opportunity to request the Dewan to convey to His Highness the Maha Raja the feelings of gratitude of the members of the Assembly for responding so readily to the popular wishes on the subject.

In connection with the reform of the Assembly, one of the important suggestions the member made was that the Assembly should have a right to move and discuss resolutions on matters of general public interest. As it was, the proceedings of the Assembly were dull and monotonous and the opinion expressed by one member on any

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